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PLACING STUDENTS IN WORK-STUDY JOBS THE EASY WAY

by John G. Bannister

There is considerable agreement among financial aid administrators that the College Work-Study program is the most difficult of all student aid programs to administer. Unlike loan or gift aid recipients, the Work-Study recipient must earn the amount of his or her award. Before the student can earn the award, however, he or she must be placed in a job for which some skills or experience are demonstrated. Once placement has been achieved then comes the recordkeeping and monitoring which the Work-Study program necessitates to ensure that the student is properly paid and that the authorized earnings eligibility is not exceeded. Attention must also be given to the needs of employers who frequently know little about the management aspects of the College Work-Study program. The task of awarding and placing several hundred students in jobs in a timely manner is no small order.

At the University of South Carolina the College Work-Study program has operated at an annual level greater than a million dollars for several years. The number of students assisted with Work-Study jobs has averaged about 1500. With this number of students involved, it is not possible to counsel each personally concerning interest and qualifications for employment. At the same time students need placement, employers require students and the Financial Aid Office is operating at its peak. To address the challenge of placing many students in a short time, the Office of Student Financial Aid and Scholarships at the University has developed a system which has proven successful in meeting the objective of timely placement of Work-Study students.

As a first step in the establishment of the system, all campus employers were surveyed to determine the type of student jobs available at the University. Once the survey was completed, student jobs ranging from animal caretaker to video engineer were categorized into ninety-nine different classifications. Positions were then classified into four levels depending upon the skills required and the responsibility entailed in the job. Level I jobs require few special skills and little or no previous training or work experience. Level II positions usually require some previous training and experience as well as some mechanical ability, manual dexterity or mental activity. Level III jobs require previous training or experience, independent judgment and considerable mental activity. Level IV jobs require a high degree of mental activity and independent judgment. Some examples of the differences are: Game Room Attendant (Level I), Broadcast Assistant (Level II), Data Entry Specialist (Level III), and Laboratory Technician (Level IV). Standard hourly pay rates are assigned by job grade levels to ensure that students receive equal pay for similar levels of work performed.

To assist employers in the use of the College Work-Study advertisement and placement system, a comprehensive College Work-Study employment manual was developed and disseminated to all employers. The manual explains in detail how the referral and placement procedure works. It provides information about completing

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the several forms in use and about the process for classifying student jobs to be advertised. While non-Work-Study employment is not centralized at the University, it has been found that some employers utilize Work-Study program procedures in classifying and advertising jobs which are completely departmentally funded.

A "Job Opportunity Board" has been established at the Financial Aid Office on which all College Work-Study job vacancies are posted. Each year employers are asked to complete job announcement forms for position vacancies they will have. These advertisements follow a format similar to the one below:

College Work-Study Employment — Job Advertisement

Job Information

Position Classification Title Receptionist II
Classification No. 0762 No. of Positions 2
Average Hrs. per Week 15 Hourly Pay Rate \$ 3.50
Job Description/Special Requirements Answer phone, direct students to career library, operate mimeo machine. Responsible for opening/closing building and securing same. Evening & weekend work.

Employer Information

Department/Agency Alumni Career Planning
Address 2nd Floor, Lieber College
Contact Person Dr. John Elkins Phone 7280

In early August and throughout the academic year, job vacancies are placed on the Job Opportunity Board under headings such as clerical, technical, etc. As students are awarded their financial aid packages, a special enclosure is included with the award letter to all students who receive a Work-Study award. The enclosure is color-coded yellow and reads as follows:

You have been awarded College Work-Study eligibility in your award package. You may earn the amount specified in your award letter.

If you have previously worked on Work-Study and if your employer wishes to retain you in his/her employ, your employer will notify our office and we will process your payroll paperwork.

If you have not previously worked on Work-Study, or if you are changing employers, select several jobs you are interested in from the Job Opportunity Board located at the Office of Student Financial Aid and Scholarships. Jobs for 1981-82 will be posted August 7, 1981. You must pick up a payroll action form from the Financial Aid receptionist. Take the payroll action form to the department(s) where you wish to interview for a job. When you decide on the position you want and the employer agrees, the employer will complete the payroll form. The payroll form must be returned to the Office of Student Financial Aid and Scholarships.

At this juncture it is important to explain that the University of South Carolina Financial Aid Office does not utilize an institutional financial aid application. By

filing an admission application and a needs analysis document which embraces the uniform methodology, a student is considered for each program for which eligibility can be determined. A standard awarding philosophy is employed resulting in each eligible recipient's receiving a self-help (work or loan) component in his or her financial aid package. By so indicating on the acceptance letter, the student is allowed to change work to loan or loan to work. The award letter to the student stipulates the amount of College Work-Study eligibility and a special notation next to the amount refers the student to the yellow enclosure described earlier. The student then proceeds to select several jobs of interest and through a process of self-selection and referral seeks employment with the advertising departments.

The process described in this article has accomplished the following objectives (1) the need to collect job information from the student has been eliminated, (2) endless hours of staff time matching student job skills and experience with available position vacancies has been significantly reduced, and (3) valuable staff time has been gained to work with students and employers who have special employment needs which require individual attention.

Once the payroll action form is returned, the student is placed on the appropriate payroll account and the job vacancy announcement is removed from the Job Board. Both students and employers have expressed satisfaction with how the advertisement and placement system works. Generally, within a week most job vacancies have been filled and students are working. Lewis and Glick in an article in the *Journal of Student Financial Aid* (1978) presented convincing arguments for utilizing a system of student self-selection of jobs and referral in the placement of College Work-Study students. Since the University is in only the second year of using the system described in this paper, no historical record has yet been established by which long term success can be predicted.

For those concerned about lack of administrative control, the author would argue that all the essential controls are available. As Work-Study awards are accepted by students a payroll action form is generated. The payroll action form is the main control document which the student obtains from the Financial Aid Office. The student takes the payroll action form to the employer who completes it and returns it to the Financial Aid Office for initiation of payroll action. At all times, the office knows how many payroll action forms have been executed and the number not claimed. At a given date, several days after classes begin, all unclaimed payroll action forms and commitments for Work-Study jobs can be cancelled and additional funds awarded if necessary.

With regard to fund utilization most aid administrators would likely agree that, given the nature of the program, a Work-Study utilization between 95-105 percent, is excellent management. The first year's experience at the University resulted in an overexpenditure of slightly less than one percent for a program of \$1,360,000. Recent legislation which permits institutions to carry forward or backward up to ten percent of the Work-Study allocation indicates that the government too has finally realized the complexity of pinpointing the exact expenditure of Work-Study dollars.

The concern about students determining for which jobs to apply can best be answered by asking who is better qualified to assess his or her own ability and experience for a particular job than the student. If employers adequately describe their available jobs students will not likely apply for positions for which they have no qualifications. As suggested by Lewis and Glick, the probability of a student remaining in a job is increased if the student makes the selection rather than being assigned by someone else.

It was stated at the outset that the College Work-Study program is probably the most complex of all student aid programs to manage. The College Work-Study program also presents the financial aid administrator with an opportunity to be in-

novative and creative. Some institutions have changed the matching ratio of federal/institutional dollars from 80/20 to 75/25 thus stretching the federal dollars to aid more students. The writer is familiar with one institution which utilized a 60/40 ratio one year when funds were acutely limited. Another novel approach for generating additional funds is to charge off-campus agencies a five or ten percent administrative fee by simply designing the off-campus agreements to require an automatic twenty-five or thirty percent match for these agencies. This extra five or ten percent can be utilized to cover administrative overhead connected with the management of the College Work-Study program. The process by which students are matched with available jobs certainly allows flexibility and provides the Work-Study program coordinator with an opportunity to be imaginative.

Since the Work-Study program spans the entire institution, it is a highly visible activity and may be the only contact that some members of the academic community have with the financial aid department. It is for this reason that we must be proficient in our management of the College Work-Study program. The system described in this article allows those who are primarily concerned, the student and employer, direct and immediate access to one another, thereby reducing delays and dissatisfaction. Concurrently, it gives the financial aid administrator more time for improved program management, long range planning, student advising and perhaps even research and publication.

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